

YORK COUNTY HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, AND GOVERNMENT

by Mrs. Thelma Hansford

OUTLINE

YORK COUNTY HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, AND GOVERNMENT

I. HISTORY OF YORK COUNTY

1. 16th Century exploration
2. 17th Century Colonization, Settlement, and Development
 - (1) 1611 Sir Thomas Dale's recommendations
 - (2) 1630 Action by Council at Jamestown
 - (3) Earliest settlers
 - (4) Representation to the Assembly
 - (5) 1633 Court session; local government in operation
 - (6) Name change
 - (7) Subdivisions
 - a. Other Counties
 - b. Parishes
 - (8) 1676 Bacon's Rebellion--attitude towards tyrannical government; "seeds" for democracy
3. 18th Century Expansion and Development
 - (1) Population increase
 - (2) Economic growth
 - a. Large land holdings
 - b. Tobacco cultivation
 - c. Shipping and use of waterways
 - (3) Political changes in attitudes
 - a. In York county itself
 - b. In the Convention
 - c. In Philadelphia and signing of Declaration of Independence
 - (4) Immediate adjustments within York County following July 4, 1776
 - (5) York County's involvement in the Revolutionary War
 - a. In the military
 - b. As a civilian
 - (6) Role of the church--social service
4. 19th Century Changes and Developments
 - (1) Population
 - (2) Economy
 - a. Agriculture
 - b. Shipping and seamanship
 - c. Seafood
 - d. Shipbuilding
 - (3) Wars with innumerable implications
 - a. War of 1812
 - b. Civil War 1865
 - (4) Transportation
 - (5) Social changes--patterns of living
5. 20th Century and Continued Developments
 - (1) Population
 - (2) Changes in land use: effects of suburbanization
 - (3) Changes in economy: effects of industrialization
 - (4) Changes in modes of transportation
 - (5) Establishment of military bases: reasons and effects

- (6) Wars: participation and effects
 - a. World War I
 - b. World War II
 - c. Later conflicts
- (7) Educational advancements
- (8) Needed expansions and changes

II. GEOGRAPHY

- 1. Location--in relation to other places, etc.
- 2. Size
- 3. Natural features
- 4. Natural resources

III. GOVERNMENT

- 1. County Administration
 - (1) The Board of Supervisors
 - (2) The County Administrator
- 2. Law Enforcement
 - (1) Commonwealth's Attorney
 - (2) Sheriff
 - (3) Medical Examiner
- 3. County Records
- 4. Finances
 - (1) Treasurer
 - (2) Commissioner of Revenue
- 5. Public Services (governmental)
 - (1) Public Education
 - (2) Social Service Bureau
 - (3) Public Health
- 6. Voting and Elections
- 7. The Judicial System
 - (1) Circuit Court
 - (2) County Court
 - (3) Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court
 - (4) Probation Officers
 - (5) Lesser Officials
 - (6) The Jury System

IV. PERSONAL DATA

- 1. Population (add: 1634---510 population
1790---U.S. First Census; York's last
1810---5,187 population
1850---442 families)
- 2. Income and wages
- 3. Labor resources, present and projected

4. Employment 1972
 - (1) Agriculture
 - (2) Manufacturing
 - (3) Wholesale trade
 - (4) Retail trade
 - (5) Tourism

V. SERVICES (INDUSTRIAL)

1. Transportation
 - (1) Early development
 - (2) Various kinds in 1972
2. Water and sewage disposal
3. Electricity and gas
4. Education
5. Recreation
6. Financial
7. Religious
8. Medical (*missing*)

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the advent in scientific knowledge had stimulated curiosity and that spirit of adventure to such an extent that men surged forth into unknown areas to add to their understandings and to seek their fortunes and fame. In their journals and log books they recorded their impressions of new places and people.

John Cabot, an Italian sea captain, was commissioned by King Henry VII in 1498 and sailed from Bristol, England to North America. (See map p. 13 Rise of American Nation by Starr, Gabriel, Ledbetter, Torrey, Yeager.) He reported observing a "great bay" with its tributaries and it is believed that this was the Chesapeake Bay.

Amerigo Vespucci, upon reaching Florida, sailed northward to explore the shoreline as far as the Chesapeake Bay. About a quarter of a century later, Verrazano, another Italian, probably covered the same area and within two years the Spaniard Ayallon, upon entering a great harbor and exploring its water courses, attempted a settlement which he called San Miguel de Gualdape.

After establishing St. Augustine in Florida in 1566, Memendez da Aviles dispatched an expedition up the coast to what he called "St. Mary's Bay," definitely the Chesapeake Bay. Seven years later, Barcia, another Spaniard, described the bay in detail and told of the many navigable rivers and harbors on both sides.

One of the reasons for Spanish exploration was to Christianize the Indian and there is an interesting story of a brother to an Indian chief, who in 1559 or 1560 gave himself up to the Spaniards who were exploring Virginia waters. He was baptized, given some education, and treated kindly. He took the name of Don Luis de Velasco which was the same as that of his sponsor. The King, Phillip, himself showed an interest in the Indian. He returned to America where he became a member of a party who set out from Havana, Cuba bound for Chesapeake Bay on a colonizing and Christianizing expedition. This was in the summer of 1566, but hunger and hardships forced the band of thirty-two to relinquish this enterprise.

However, in 1570 another expedition was formed and by September reached the Chesapeake Bay; explored Hampton Roads; and sailed up the James River to a tributary believed to be College Creek. The Indian, Don Luis, eight priests, and a young man named Alonzo Zaballo, along with provisions and lumber for constructing a shelter, were put ashore. The Spanish ship left for more supplies.

It is not really known why the priests decided to cross the peninsula toward the York banks. Don Luis, who was familiar with this area served as the guide.

The region surrounding the present Indian Fields, so marked on the National Parkway, was ruled by the Chiskiack Indians. It was here that Don Luis and the other eight lived six months among the Indians. Then a massacre wiped out all but one, the boy Alonzo Zaballo. For a detailed and interesting account of this Spanish effort to colonize on the Tidewater Peninsula, which actually was within the present Naval Weapons Station, read The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1570-72 by Clifford M. Lewis and Albert J. Loomie.

Englishmen likewise visited Virginia waterways, but it was Captain John Smith who has given more details. Given is an excerpt from The History of Virginia by William Smith, p. 5, printed in 1747.

1607--All thoughts of an Attack upon James-Town being therefore laid aside, they led Smith in Show and Triumph about the Country. And first they carried him to those that dwelt on Youghtamund, or as it is now called, Pamunkey River. For the main River, which is since named York River, was then called Pamunkey; altho' the Country of Pamunkey, over which Opechancanough was King, lay in the Fork of the River, and his chief Sent was nearby, where the Pamunkey Town now is. From the Youghtanunds they led him to the Mattaponies, the Piankatanks, the Nantaughtsounds, on Rappahanock, and the Nominics, on Patowmack River. And having passed him over all those Rivers, they brought him back, through several other Nations, to Opechancanough's Habitation at Pamunkey; where, with frightful howlings, and many strange and hellish Ceremonies, they conjured him three Days, to know, as they told him, whether he intended them well or ill. After this, they brought him a Bag of Gunpowder, which they judged to be a Grain, springing out of the Earth, as other Grains did; and therefore they carefully preserved it, intending to plant it the next Spring, as they did their Corn. And then he was invited, in a sumptuous Manner, by Opitohapan, second Brother to Powhatan, and next heir to all his Dominions. But here, as in all other Places, none of them would touch a Morsel with him; although they would feast very merrily upon what he left. At last they conducted him to Werowocomoco, where Powhatan the Emperor was. Werowocomoco lay on the North Side of the York River, in Gloucester County, nearly opposite to the Mouth of Queen's Creek and about twenty Miles below the Fork of the River. It was at that time Powhatan's principal Place of Residence; altho' afterwards, not admiring the near Neighbourhood of the English, he retired to Orapakes.

The need for a settlement (other than Indian) in the York region was recognized as early as 1611 when Sir Thomas Dale, the Deputy Governor, recommended to the Earl of Salisbury, that a fortified place be established at Chiskiack. After the massacre in 1622 the Chiskiack (Kishiack) Indians moved to the region of the Piankatank River. Then it was that the Jamestown colonists considered building a palisade from the James River to the York River thus making the area conducive to further settlement.

At a meeting of the Council at Jamestown in 1630 an order was issued granting fifty acres to every person who would settle within a year on the Charles River (the name before it was changed to York) and twenty-five acres to every person taking up residence in the following year. Two tracts of land comprising six hundred acres each were granted to Captain John West and Captain John Utis at the same Court session. The two men were placed in charge of the settlement.

About five miles above Yorktown, Felgate's Creek and Queen's Creek create a bay as they flow towards the York River and on the east side of this Captain West settled; on the west was taken up by Captain Utie. Captain Robert Felgate, a well-known London sea captain, patented that land lying at the angle formed by the two creeks. Soon other settlers took advantage of the offer made by the Council. Francis Morgan was granted land on the east of Captain West; Mr. William Pryor was next to him and Captain Richard Townsend possessed the high ground west of Yorktown Creek. On the east side of that creek where the present county seat is located, Captain Nicholas Martiau, a Frenchman, claimed his rights.

The population increased rapidly along the river so that by 1612 York was divided into two districts with two representatives to the Assembly: Captain Martiau, and Mr. Lyonel Rowlston. Settlers continued to come looking for fortunes and to avoid the disruptions in England caused by the civil wars.

The first entry in the York records indicates that Court was in session July 12, 1633 at Utimaria (Cheatham Annex and Penniman Road) at the home of Captain John Utie. The first Justices recorded were Captain Utie, Mr. William English, Captain Nicholas Martiau, Mr. Lyonel Royalston, Captain Robert Felgate, and Mr. Richard Townsend. By July 7, 1634 Court was moved to York and later held in the homes of the various Justices.

Around the same time, in 1634-35, the entire colony was divided into eight counties of shires and thus was created Charles River Shire, now York County. It was quite large land wise and other counties have been subdivided from it, namely; Northumberland in 1645; Gloucester in 1651; New Kent in 1654; Lancaster in 1651, and all the country west of the Poropotank Creek. (Since then Mathews County has been separated from Gloucester, so that too, was a part of York County.)

As new plantations and Hundreds were established (meaning an area or district containing a Court) parishes soon appeared. A parish was a region over which a minister from the Established Church served the people and tried to convert the "heathen." Those in York have been identified thus: in 1646 Poquoson Parish reaching from Back River to Back Creek; York Parish covering from Back Creek to Yorktown Creek; Hampton Parish extending from Yorktown Creek to Queen's Creek which marked the westerly limits of the county. In 1657 records show the parishes as New Poquoson (later changed in 1692 to Charles Parish) from Back River to Back Creek; York from Back Creek to Yorktown Creek; Chiskiack or Hampton from Yorktown Creek to Queen's Creek; Marston from Queen's Creek to Skimeno Creek; Middle Plantation extending over that area from Queen's Creek to Archer's Hope Creek. Later (in 1674) the upper parish was changed to Bruton Parish. York and Hampton were combined to form York-Hampton (Yorkhampton) in 1706. The names of these parishes appear in the early deeds and Court orders which tend to identify persons and tracts of land.

Besides the encouragement to prospective settlers by the Council at Jamestown, the London Company likewise promoted the movement. It decreed that any person who bore the expense of his own passage to the colony would be granted fifty acres of land "for his owne personal adventure" and if he brought "at his owne cost" one or more persons, he would be awarded an additional fifty acres for each of these passengers. Thus came about the term headrights which appears in the wordings of patents and records.

Among the headrights one finds a cross section of society, nobility and gentry; yeomanry; indentured servants (most from outstanding families); and Negroes. Often times these planters returned to England for more relatives or friends as their "headrights" and this accounts for the large land holdings of many early settlers. Given in abstract form are several examples of patents:

Lt. John Chisman, 600 acres Charles River Co. (York Co.)
21 Nov. 1635; S.E. upon the New Poquoson River; N.W. into
the woods by Oyster Creek towards a ridge of land ad-
jacent S.W. upon land of Thomas Hawkings. Transporting
12 persons: Christopher Everitt, Philip Aunt, Mary a
Negro, Edward Cotterell, Jone Bolton, Robert Cockett,
Richard Duning, Richard Ward, George Costen, Richard
Banks, John Harwell, Mathias a Negro.

Walter Hacker, 600 acres, Charles River Co. (York Co.)
23 Sept. 1636; N. upon the New Poquoson River, S. into
the woods, E. upon Thomas Curtis his creek and W. upon
the land of Robert Lucas. Due for transporting Alice
Hacker, his now wife and 11 persons: John Powell,
Thomas Powell, George Haverell, Richard Pate, 1 Negro,
John Williams, John Figg, Thomas Jones, John Bradbury,
Henry Crow, Thomas Wingfield.

Major James Goodwin, 400 acres Westmoreland Co, 24 Dec.
1653 for transporting eight persons. (Note: This
Major Goodwin later moved to York Co. and his holdings
included the whole of Goodwin's Neck and Goodwin's
Island also some land on the south side of Back Creek
in Seaford.)

Mr. John Hansford, 850 acres Yorke Co., Dec. 1658; 75
acres upon a branch of Capt. West's Creek; westerly on
N. side of land of the widow Downe and on S. side by
land of Thomas Weston, Marriner. 650 acres easterly upon
said creek and northerly upon Sergeant Waines land.
125 acres adjacent said tracts, land of Capt. Harrwood,
deceased (now Capt. Hurd's) 725 acres granted 10 June
1652 and the residue for transporting three persons:
Rowland Thomas, Charles Dunne, Thomas Symmons.

Thomas Moreland, 100 acres Yorke Co, 10 Aug. 1642 upon
Capt. West's Creek, adjacent William Sawyer. Due for
adventure of himself and Christopher Brown to Chiskiacke
the first year.

Henry Lee, 247 acres Yorke Co., 3 March 1649 abutting
N.W. upon branch of Capt. West's Creek; S.W. upon land
of Thomas Morley and N.E. upon land of William Sawyer.
Transportation of five persons: Henry Lee, John Lee,
Elizabeth Boshfield, Ann Russell, Thomas Johnson.

Benjamin Hubbard came with Nicholas Comeings (Comings) who got 200 acres Charles River Co., 1 Sept. 1639 upon Utley's Creek adjacent Robert Pitway and Richard Ford.

Arthur Prise (Price) got 1700 acres in upper York Co. for bringing in 3⁴ persons including Richard Mosse. 6 May 1651.

Cavaliers and Pioneers, Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants 1623-1666 by Nell Nugent (a book of 766 pages in fine print) will give information on land ownership and persons transported to the New World, not just for York County, but for the Virginia Colony in general. These early patents are in the Virginia State Library in Richmond for persons interested in intensive research.

The development of an area is often realized through a study of typical persons and specific places. Some of these are suggested, assuming that certain individuals may wish to pursue some research on one or several of these.

PEOPLE

1. On the Council at Jamestown

1631 Hugh Bullock
1637 William Brocas; Richard Townsend
1642 George Ludlow
1651 William Taylor (Tayloe)
1655 William Gooch
1657 George Reade
1659 Francis Willis
1662 Thomas Beale
1665 Daniel Parke
1681 John Page
1692 Daniel Parke II
1698 Dudley Digges
1699 Edmund Jenings

2. Members of the House of Burgesses

1632 Lyonel Rowlston, Capt. Nicholas Martiau
1639 William _____, Hugh Gwyn, Peregrine Bland
1641 Capt. Richard Townsend, George Ludlowe, George Worleigh
1642 John Chew, Capt. John Chisman, William Taylor
1644 John Chew, Rowland Burnham, Capt. Christopher Calthorpe
1645 Capt. C. Calthorpe, Rowland Burnham, Arthur Price
1646 Hugh Gwin, William Luddington
1647 Richard Lee, Capt. William Tayler, Francis Morgan
1649 Capt. Ralph Wormley, Rowland Burnham
1652 (April) Capt. Fra. Morgan, Henry Lee, Capt. Austin Warner
1652 (Nov.) Capt. Stephen Gill, William Gouge, Major Christopher Calthorpe
1653 Major Calthorpe, Robert Booth, William Hoskaday, Capt. Francis Morgan

2. Members of the House of Burgesses (continued)

- 1654 Capt. William Gooch, Robert Booth, John Hayward
1655 Lt. Col. George Reade, John Page, Joseph Croshaw, Capt.
Ralph Langley, Capt. Francis Willis, Nathaniel Bacon,
Arminger Wade

For other Burgesses for York (and the colony) through June 1, 1775
see Colonial Virginia Register by William G. and Mary Standard.

3. Justices

- 1633 Captain William Utie
William English
Captain Nicholas Martiau
Lyonel Royston
Captain Robert Felgate
Richard Townsend

The County Court records give lists of Justices sitting at each session of Court. These are in the County Clerk's office.

(Note: A body of Justices sat for court hearings many years before one Judge was named to hear all cases in a county or circuit. The office of Justice of Peace during the Colonial period carried responsibility and prestige. An article entitled "Justice of Peace of Colonial Virginia" by Edward Ingle, printed in a Bulletin of the Virginia State Library Vol. XIV, No's 2 and 3 (1922) states that such appointments were made by the Governor and there was a tendency for the office to be hereditary, passing from father to son. It further indicates that judging from the names of the men selected prior to the American Revolution, Colonial Justices were the "most able, honest, and judicious persons in the County" as required by law then.)

4. Some officers appointed for York County found in English Duplicates of Lost Virginia Records by Louis des Cognets, Jr.:

<u>Sheriffs</u>	1699	Thomas Ballard
	1700	Henry Tyler
	1701	Daniel Taylor
	1702	Henry Taylor
	1706	William Barber
	1707	William Barber
	1708	Lawrence Smith
	1709	Lawrence Smith
	1710	William Timson
	1711	William Timson
	1712	Thomas Roberts
	1714	Thomas Nutting
1702	<u>Her Majesty's Learned Council in the Law</u>	Benjamin Harrison
	<u>Surveyor</u>	Miles Carey
1714	<u>Coroners</u>	Henry Tyler, Lawrence Smith
	<u>Clerk of the Court</u>	Philip Hightfoot
	<u>Surveyor</u>	John Sclater
	<u>Ministers</u>	Mr. Blair, Francis Fountain, Mr. Faulkner

5. 17th Century settlers as named by Dr. Taylor in "York County in the Seventeenth Century," Tylers Quarterly Magazine, Vol. I, pp. 240-241.

6. "Rent Roll of All the Land in York County in 1704," English Duplicates of Lost Virginia Records by Louis des Cognets, Jr. shows the names of these residents of York County at that particular time:

William Jackson	200 acres	Ralph Hubbard	50 acres
Matt. Pierce	100	Wm. Harrison	50
Jno. Latin	150	Jno. Wyth	100
Rob't Cobbs	100	Thos. Hill	930
Francis Sharp	100	Thos. Vines	200
Geo. Baskewyle	350	Morgan Baptist	100
Richard Gilford	100	Phil. Dedman	75
Jos. Frith	50	Basill Wagstaff	127
Wm. Jones	70	Wm. Allen	117
Nath. Crawley	384	Robert Read	750
Thos. Crips	750	Jos. Mountford	307
Wm. Davis	200	Roger Boult	100
Lewis Barnee	80	Edward Fuller	70
Arthur Lun	50	Thomas Jefferson	100
Jno. Bates	669	Henry Duke	25
Jno. Serginton	150	Jno. Hansford	100
Wm. Taylor	100	Robert Peters	160
Richard Page	150	Jno. Moreland	100
Wm. Jordon	580	Wm. Lee	350
Jno. Lynes	150	Richard Burt	200
Alex. Banymen	50	Thos. Buck	350
Wm. Cobbs	50	Robert Crawley	400
Mary Whaley	550	Robert Eaton	170
Henry Tyler	180	Robert Starke	250
Richard Kendall	150	Rob. Harrison	200
Wm. Hansford	300	Jno. Morris	125
Nich. Sebnell	150	James Bates	117
David Stoner	50	Elizabeth Jones	94
Edward Young	100	Mongo Inglis	400
Robert Green	200	Thos. Holyday	100
Thos. Fear	100	Jno. Williams	100
Edward Thomas	223	Anthony Sebrell	50
John Loyall	100	Robert Jones	100
Stephen Pond	200	James Cansebee	200
Wm. Wise	850	Richard Booker	200
Cornelius Shoehorn	100	James Morris	100
Jos. White	750	Henry Atkinson	82
Daniel Park Esq.	2750	Robert Jackson	150
Thos. Fears Jr.	130	Anthony Robinson	183
Orlando Jones	450	Hannah Lamb	50
Ambrose Cobbs	163	James Calthorp	900
Henry Dyer	50	Thos. Boulmor	365
Wm. Davis	100	Peter Pasque	12
Wm. Buckner	302½	Jno. Chapman	70
Thomas Barber	600	Jno. Pond	112
Elizabeth Tindall	60	Sarah Tomkins	250
Dudley Digges		Robert Kirby	200
Wm. Hewitt	150	Thomas Kirby	270

Mary Collier	433	acres	Edward Curtis	270	acres
Charles Collier	684		Jno. Furguson	200	
Thomas Hansford	75		Wm. Row	902	
Geo. Brown	150		John Hunt	550	
Wm. Gibbs	50		Wm. Taverner	100	
Wm. Pekithman	650		Armingier Wade	424	
Jno. Smith	150		Richard Dixon	490	
Baldwin Mathews	1300		Edward Jennings	1650	
Jno. Daniell	200		Jno. Persons	300	
Seamore Powell	130		Thomas Nutting	375	
Jno. Lewis Esq.	300		Peter Manson	150	
Wm. Timson	2000		Richard Slaughter	275	
John Page	490		James Persons	350	
Jos. Benjafield	80		Thos. Roberts	450	
Thos. Stear	60		John Toomer	335	
Stephen Fovace	565		Daniel Taylor	225	
Edward Jennings Esq	850		Robert Hayes	220	
Elizabeth Archer	370		Henry Andros	274	
Wm. Coman	50		John Wells	750	
Elizabeth Hansford	100		Robert Curtis	250	
Samuel Hill	25		Thos Cheesman Sr.	1800	
John Henderson	50		Joseph Potter	25	
Lewis Burwell	2100		Henry Heywood	1300	
Robert Hyde	200		David Holyday	600	
Robert Harrison	250		Jno. Northern	130	
Jeffry Overstreet	50		John Doswell	367	
Thos. Overstreet	50		Isaac Powell	100	
John Myhill	52		Symon Staice	200	
Mary Roberts	25		John Drewitt	200	
Benj. Stagsdall	50		Robert Tipladie	100	
Thomas Wade	375		John Potter	93	
Joseph Walker	615		Lewis Varnum	150	
John Sanders	100		James Slaughter	250	
Thos. Burnham	50		John Doswell Jr.	100	
Robert Shields	400		Wm. Wilson	50	
Oren Davis	247		Thomas Walker	100	
Richard Nixon	150		Richard Nixon	150	
Henry Clark	150		Elias Love	25	
Wm. Howard	100		John Sanderver	100	
John Cox	50		Thomas Gibbins	100	
Thomas Hind	100		Thomas Cheesman Jr.	600	
Wm. Brown	200		Jno. Rogers	650	
John Moss	150		John Lawson	100	
Nicholas Phillips	150		Wm. Sheldon	750	
John Wayman	100		Thomas Edmonds	150	
Lawrence Smith	1700		James Paulmer	150	
Wm. Garrow	150		Peter Goodwin	400	
Robert Snead	50		Edward Crawley	150	
Wm. Gordon	150		John Hilsman	75	
John Wright	100		John Gibbons	50	
Elizabeth Goodwin	1200		Samuel Cooper	150	
John Fripps	150		Thomas Wooten	150	
Edward Moss	759		Rebecha Watkins	100	
Wm. Whitaker	1800		Hampton Parish	200	
Bruton Parish Glebe	300				
Robert Ivy - he living in James City County and no tenant on land.					

William Barber, Sheriff York County.

(Note: The Quit Rent Rolls for Warwick County and Gloucester County are also in the same reference book; since they are adjacent to York County, one may find a family name which particularly interests him.)

7. Men in attendance at the Conventions 1775-1776

Dudley Digges
Thomas Nelson Jr.
Hugh Nelson
William Digges (alternate May 1776)

8. Signer of the Declaration of Independence

Thomas Nelson Jr.

Swemm's Index and Torrence's Virginia Wills and Administration 1632-1800 (York Co. sections) found in all colleges and public libraries will give leads for further research on most prominent people and families of York County.

PLACES

1. Ringfield
2. Bellfield
3. Kiskiack (The Lee House)
4. Yorktown
5. The Thomas Sessions House (Sheild House)
6. The Archer Cottage
7. The Thomas Pate House (Cole Digges House)
8. The Custom House
9. The West House (Dudley Digges House)
10. The Rungo Somerwell House (Philip Lightfoot House or the Old Yorktown Hotel)
11. The Swan Tavern
12. The Nelson House (York Hall)
13. The Edmund Smith House
14. The Captain John Ballard House
15. The County Court House
16. The Moore House (Temple Farm)

Reference material for all of these places is found in:

Colonial Yorktown by Clyde F. Trudell (found on sale at Park Service Information Center)

Old Virginia Homes by Emmie Ferguson Farrar (combined edition)

Your Yorktown by Charles A. Williamson (on sale at Yorktown Drug Store)

17. Yorkhampton Parish (Grace Episcopal Church)
18. Charles Parish

Reference material:

Trudell's Yorktown

Colonial Churches of Tidewater, Virginia by George C. Mason

Charles Parish, York County, Virginia History and Registers, 1648-1789

by Landon Bell

19. Others

- (1) "A History of Queen's Creek" by Robert Rogers
(Manuscript: term paper written 1968 for Government class at York High School, Thelma Hansford, teacher.)
- (2) "Naval Weapons Station" by Susan Clinger
(Manuscript: term paper written 1961 for Government class at York High School, Mrs. Hansford, teacher.)
- (3) "York County" by Randolph Moreland
(Manuscript: term paper written for Government class at York High School, Mrs. Hansford, teacher.)

18th CENTURY YORK

A Critical Period: 1775-1783

During the 17th and first half of the 18th century emphasis was on being a part of a British colony with every day life and activities patterned after that culture. However, with growth and expansion, and with the denial of personal rights due English subjects, England became a distant land and America was home. Added to this alienation were immigrants from other places with their mode of living and the division between the Mother Country and the County here grew wider.

A Court record in York shows that Edmund Chisman, a Vestryman in Charles Parish, took the "usual oaths to his Majesty's Person and government and repeated and subscribed to Test" as the law directed March 21, 1774. Other officials took the same oath; they were law abiding people, but their endurance had an end. Slowly they moved toward independence.

The Virginia delegates to the Continental Congress were instructed to vote for separation from Britain. Dudley Digges, Thomas Nelson Jr., with William Digges as alternate, were in attendance from York County. Thomas Nelson Jr. was among the Signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Meanwhile, the colony became a State or Commonwealth and a new government itself was established. Business had to continue, and necessary adjustments and changes were made almost immediately.

In York County, at the session of Court held July 15, 1776, the Justices took the oath directed by an ordinance of the Convention to enable the existing magistrates "to continue the administration of Justice and for settling the general mode of proceedings in criminal and other cases, so the same can be more simply provided for." (Orders No. 4, York Co. Records, p. 125) These Justices were David Jameson, Starkey Robinson, William Digges Jr., Augustine Moore, and William Reynolds. At the same time Thomas Everard, Clerk of the Court, was administered the same Oath of Fidelity.

Open conflict brings about a need for more revenue, so the Court, that same day, took necessary action. The following were sworn in to take a list of tithables, lands, and wheel carriages in the county: John Dixon, gent. in Bruton Parish; William Digges Jr. in Yorkhampton Parish, upper precinct; Augustine Moore, gent. Yorkhampton Parish, lower precinct; Starkey Robinson, gent. in both precincts in Charles Parish. At a later session (March 17, 1777) the sheriff was ordered to collect from each titheable person in the county ten pounds tobacco or one shilling, three pence; this tobacco was to be sold at public auction and out of the money arising claims against the county would be met. There was a bill for 269 hours for patrollers.

Movement of supplies required road repairs and the Court ordered that John Parsons be paid 6 pounds, 14 shillings for repairs to Finch's Dam Bridge. Harwood Burt was appointed Surveyor of the Highway from Yorktown to the line of Charles Parish below Tiplady's Bridge in the place of the former Surveyor. Edmund Chisman was likewise appointed

Surveyor of the Highway in place of Thomas Nelson Jr. and Edward Baptist replaced Hugh Nelson. (Both Thomas and Hugh Nelson were otherwise engaged in the Revolution.) A month later Allen Chapman became Surveyor of the Highway in the place of William Moss who was discharged from office.

William Reynolds, already a sworn Justice, became Surveyor of the Stack and Landing Places in Yorktown in place of the former person, who was discharged. At the March 17, 1777 Court session Dudley Digges, John Blair, David Jameson, William Graves, and John Tazewell (or any three of them) were instructed "to agree with some person to make the creek navigable through the bridge lately erected by Lord Dunmore at the Capitol Landing and to stop up said creek where the old bridge stands." (Orders, No. 4, p. 137) John Patrick and William Kerby, Inspectors of Tobacco at Roe's Warehouse, took the oath required by the Tobacco Law and John Robinson and Merritt Moore were appointed to examine and adjust the scales and weights at Roe's Warehouse and have them repaired if needed.

William Moody resigned from Inspector of Tobacco at Capitol Landing and Benjamin Valentine filled the vacancy. Thomas Pescud, William Graves, and William Rogers were made Commissioners of the Taxes.

In the summer of 1777 charges were brought against Thomas Roberts, Surveyor of the Highway from the Half-way House (between York and Hampton) for not having the road in proper order. This case was later dismissed, but it shows the importance placed upon having arteries for transportation. John Robinson was put in charge of roads from Garrett's Run to Finch's Dam and the highway to Roe's Warehouse was added to his precinct. Benjamin Bates filled that office for the area from Williamsburg to Ashley's Ordinary in place of Flemming Bates. Henry Howard was appointed Surveyor from his mill to the Warehouse Road and the "male laboring tithes of said Howard, Mr. Davenport, and Mr. John Patrick" were ordered to work that road and keep it in good condition. The Court Orders continue to indicate the various changes and charges made relative to the highways in the county during the years of the Revolution.

August 18, 1777 an order was issued that Queen's Creek be made navigable through the stone bridge "lately erected" and that a ditch be cut so that the water would pass from the landing across the marsh to the said bridge and into the creek opposite to it.

Thomas Lilly was appointed Keeper of the Public Ferry across York River from Yorktown to Gloucester and it was ordered by the Court (Nov. 16, 1778) that he keep two good and sufficient boats with four "able hands" for transporting carriages, horses, and passengers over the said ferry. The law directed that he post bond with proper securities before entering into this employment. A later court record shows that Lawrence Gibbons and John Moss were operating the ferry at the rate of one shilling for a single ferrage "and so in proportion for a greater number." Inflation comes with war and prices tend to rise. The rates for use of the ferry by April 19, 1779 were "from Yorktown to Tindell's Point in Gloucester County for a man four shillings, a horse four shillings, coach, chariot, phaeton, or wagon twenty shillings, a cart or two wheel chair or a chair eight shillings."

There was another ferry from Cappahosick to Skimmino and the prices for it were double those on the lower part of the York River.

With the advent of open hostilities, the local militia was busy expanding and recruiting. There is no one list of York County people who served in the military, but random records do give some insight in this matter. At the county court session held March 17, 1777 Robert Manson, Lieutenant and William Patrick, Ensign in Captain Kerby's Company of Militia in the County took the oath as directed by law. The following month (April 21, 1777) the Court recommended to the Governor that Manson be promoted to Captain; Patrick to Lieutenant; and Willis Wilson be commissioned as Ensign. At the same time James Sheild, Captain; Abraham Archer, Captain, and Edmund Chisman, Lieutenant in the York County Militia were sworn in according to the law.

About the same time because of an Act of Assembly requiring that all male inhabitants of the State above a certain age to give assurance of allegiance "to the same and for other purposes," the Court appointed people to "make a tour of the County and tender the oath or affirmation in the said Act mentioned to all free born male persons above the age of sixteen years (except imported servants)." These were: Robert Prentis in that part of Williamsburg which was in York County; William Graves and Joseph Prentis (or either of them) in that part of Bruton Parish in York County but not in the city of Williamsburg; William Digges Jr. in the upper precinct of York-Hampton Parish; William Reynolds and Lawrence Smith (or either of them) in the lower precinct of York-hampton Parish; and Starkey Robinson, John Robinson, and Merritt Moore in Charles Parish.

There must have been a goodly number of soldiers in the county, even that early in the war, for at the April 21, 1777 term of Court upon a motion, it was ordered that Corbin Griffin and James Sheild inquire into "the circumstances of the wives and children of such poor soldiers of this county in the services of the Commonwealth who cannot be maintained by associations for that purpose and report the same to the Court in order that necessary provisions may be made agreeable to a Resolution of the last Assembly."

A few of the Commissioned Officers in York County Militia mentioned in York Court records include:

Thomas Nelson, Jr., Lieutenant.
John Gibbons, Ensign in Captain Abraham Archer's Company of Militia.
Samuel Timson, Second Lieutenant in Captain Sheild's Company.
Willis Wilson, Second Lieutenant, later promoted to Lieutenant in Captain Robert Manson's Company.
Robert Sheild, Ensign and promoted to Second Lieutenant, in Captain Manson's Company.
John Holt, Second Lieutenant, Captain James Sheild's Company.
Ambrose Jackson, Ensign, Captain Sheild's Company.
Ralph Graves, Lieutenant of Foot (Infantry) in the Militia of the County.
William Moody, Jr., Ensign.

James Sheild, Jr., Second Lieutenant, promoted to Lieutenant,
in Captain James Sheild's Company.
Benjamin Valentine, Ensign, in Captain Sheild's Company.
Butts Roberts, Ensign.

Following the surrender, it was still necessary to maintain a
County Militia and those officers in charge as of February 1783
were:

Arthur Dickerson, Lieutenant-Colonel
James Sheild, Major
James Sheild, Jr., Captain of Upper Company
John Gibbons, Captain of Middle Company
John Travis, Second Lieutenant
Richard Hansford, Ensign
George Chisman, First Lieutenant of Middle Company
Thomas Ryland, Second Lieutenant of Middle Company
Thomas Powell, Ensign
Robert Sheild, Second Lieutenant for Lower Company
Robert Howard, Ensign.

The names of these soldiers have been gleaned from York Court
records; they may have been natives or they could have been from
elsewhere and stationed there:

Duncan McPherson
Hind Holloway
Joseph Hughes--"enlisted in the County in the service of
the Commonwealth"
Thomas Powell--in Capt. Nelson's Company
John Denberry--in Regiment of Artillery
Alexander Hay
Elisha James
Peter James
William Creedle
Gemmell (son of James Gemmell)
Emanuel Alvis
Ashby (son of Sally Ashby)
James Musgrove
John May
William Alexander
Robert Scott
Benjamin Hudson
John Dunn
John Burcher (died in service)
Pate Harris (died in service)
Lewis Caldwell
William Kennedy
Charles Lyle
Peter Myatt (died in service)
Mitchell
Christopher Francis
John Hix
John Bowles
James Figg
Reade (2 sons of Mary Reade)
Munday (son of Sarah Munday).

Jim Jones, a resident of the County of York and State aforesaid, aged 86 years, who being first duly sworn according to law, doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the pensions made by the Act of Congress passed the 7th of June 1832----That he enlisted in the Army of the United States in the year----with Capt. Edward Digges and served in the 3rd Virginia Regiment State line under the following officers for the space of four years and four months. That he went in service for his master Rolling Jones, under Captain Edward Digges; was then put under Captain Ewell and then under Captain Woodson, who gave him a discharge which has been destroyed by his house being burned. That he was at the battle of Camden Courthouse and also at the battle of Yorktown in Virginia at which last battle he lost his left leg by a musket ball--He was taken prisoner at Camden Courthouse, North Carolina and was exchanged and again joined the army at the Point of Forks in Virginia. That he went as a substitute of his master Rolling Jones and was given his freedom by the County for the dutiful manner he acted while a soldier. He hereby relinquished every claim whatsoever to a pension or annuity except the present and he declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any State.

Jim Jones"

"And the Court certified as their opinion that the above named applicant was a Revolutionary Soldier and served as he stated----And Alexander W. Green certified as follows: 'I, Alexander W. Green, aged 74 years last January do hereby certify that I was intimately acquainted with Rolling Jones and I know that the said Rolling Jones, in a drunken frolick enlisted during the Revolutionary War and when he got sober he put Jim Jones, the applicant, as his substitute and the said Jim Jones was set free by the County for the faithful manner he discharged his duty while acting as a soldier.' Sworn 15 July 1833.

Court certified that said Green is a very old man--of honest character and any statement by him is entitled to full credit."

Disease and illness usually accompany the congregating of people and during those turbulent days the residents of Yorktown were exposed to a scourge, namely, smallpox. The Court instructed "Mr. Secretary Nelson--to apply to the Governor and the Council to remove out of the Town of York all such soldiers as are infected and such of them as have not had the smallpox and that guards be appointed to prevent the spread of the distemper." (December 15, 1777; Orders

No. 4, p. 155) When Court convened the next month a group of Justices were appointed "to license such places in the County as they think fit to inoculate persons with the smallpox under such restrictions and regulations as they judge necessary and proper." (Orders No. 4, p. 158)

Most of the provisions for the military came from the local citizenry. A list of such supplies gives the names of nearly three hundred residents who met this demand. Articles mentioned include: beef, mutton, pork, bacon, flour, meal, corn, oats, peas, fodder, vinegar, salt, wood, straw, wagons, and horses. Added to these were rum, saffia, and brandy probably used for medical purposes. One man was allowed 35 pounds for "sundries furnished for the hospital by an order of Marquise de LaFayette" and another was paid for 74½ yards of sail duck. Some hired out their boats for portage, worked as "armorers," while others "found tools." (See Manuscript: General List of Claims of the Inhabitants of the County of York, Virginia copied and compiled by Mrs. Elizabeth Hogg Ironmonger, the original being in The Virginia State Library.)

The British troops preyed upon the residents and not only took food but also fine furniture which probably was used for fire wood. Live stock and fowl, guns and pistols, "paneling and palings," cross-cut saws, axes, bridles, rugs, quilts, sheets, linen handkerchiefs, shoes, boots, and brandy were but a few of the articles for which claims were made after the enemy had passed through in 1781.

The destruction and hardships caused by war in Southeast Asia are heard about daily; one can hardly imagine what life was like in York County, especially around Yorktown, during those years when independence was being fought for at so great a cost in lives and property.

Details of the campaign at Yorktown and the subsequent surrender of the British are covered in The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis by Henry P. Johnston. Other material available includes:

Yorktown and the Siege of 1781 by Charles E. Hatch Jr. (National Park Service Historical Handbook Series No. 14, Washington, D. C., 1954).

Yorktown, Climax of the Revolution by Charles E. Hatch and Thomas M. Pitkin (United States Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1956).

These are on sale at the Information Center

YORK COUNTY AND THE WARS

THE WAR OF 1812

Many pages have been written about the Revolutionary War and Yorktown. However, while researching on the War of 1812, using chiefly history textbooks, most of the information concerned Canada and the northern United States. Mention was made of American ships being swept from the seas and shipping being interrupted. This, then, involved York County for Yorktown was a port of some importance then. There is recorded a communication between Thomas Archer, Commander of the First Battalion of the 68th Regiment and the Governor of the Commonwealth. He stated that the local people desired more defense and pointed out that the area "covered by the battalion reaches from Goodwin's Point (at the mouth of the York River) and terminates at the College in the City of Williamsburg." A postscript was added which told of his being informed "by a passenger by stage from Williamsburg that the Revenue Cutter Surveyor, commanded by Captain Samuel Travis, lying opposite the Capitol Creek, was captured last night by four of the enemy's barges that came up the York River." (Calendar 7/6 State Papers Vol. X, p. 229.)

The Virginia Militia Muster Rolls for York County show the 68th Battalion commanded by Captain Archer, Captain James Hubbard, Lieutenant Filmer Clarke, and Lieutenant William B. Power with over two hundred men under them. Besides officers there were the privates, drummers, fifers, and twenty-five wagoners. Captain Henry Howard's Company of the 158th Regiment had eighty-four men and Captain William Sclater's Company included thirty-six from York County.

Meanwhile, Captain Samuel Sheild's Company of Light Infantry, part of the 2nd Battalion, 115th Regiment of the Virginia Militia was stationed in Hampton and the names of forty-five York County men are given. There must have been particular action on June 25th 1813 for Capt. Sheild recorded in his personal records these casualties: Aaron Tennis, wounded and died; Curtis Hunt, wounded; Carter Longest, killed; Thomas Pescud, wounded; Tyler Crockett, killed; John Charles, wounded; James Martin, killed; James Holloway, wounded; Thomas Watkin, wounded; Thomas Parsons, wounded.

In 1814 Yorktown was ravaged by fire and practically everything on the waterfront was wiped out. It has been said that as the British went through the town, they used the furniture in Grace Episcopal Church for a bonfire, afterwards using the church as a stable.

THE CIVIL WAR

Virginia, being a southern state, was a part of the Confederacy, hence York County people were involved in that side of the issue. Practically all of the male population, except the extremely young and the very old, were actively engaged.

Because Fort Monroe at Old Point Comfort was a National installation, and Richmond was the capitol of the Confederacy, the Peninsula was a battlefield. When the Federal forces started their march to Richmond under General McClellan, he used Yorktown as a base for his supplies. It took a month for him with 110, 000 men to seize the town for lines of fortification had been thrown up across the Peninsula from Yorktown to the James River. With only 11,000 forces under his command, General McGruder (Magruder) defended the area and slowed the march of the Federal troops to Richmond.

Remnants of forts may still be seen at Ship's Point, Hornbysville, and Yorktown as well as at Fort Magruder in Williamsburg. The fort in Seaford, reaching from Back Creek to Chisman's Creek has just recently been leveled. General McClellan's men built a road beginning at the forks of the Seaford-Waterview Roads and leading through Marlbank Farm. They crossed the head of Wormley's Creek at one point by building a dam or road across it(still there) and by using an old mill dam site at another branch.

The remains of buried logs used for a corderoy road over the marsh at York Point (Seaford) were found in recent years when a real estate company started a housing development there. Old people have told of small boats being used as pontoons across Chisman's Creek to link Dare (Fish Neck) with Seaford (Crab Neck).

Grafton Christian Church was used as a stable and Grace Episcopal Church was turned into a hospital. Zion Methodist Church served as firewood, being completely demolished.

Gone With the Wind portrays vividly Georgia during that war. A few excerpts from personal writings of several York County residents may give present generations some insight into life here 1861-1865.

William Franklin Hopkins: born November 13, 1849, eight miles below Yorktown, his father died six months later leaving a widow, two sons, and five daughters and an estate of land and property considered sufficient for rearing and educating the children according to standards of the wealthier class of that day. Then came the war.

When General Joseph E. Johnston, in the spring of 1862 found it necessary to evacuate the peninsula the, Federal Army under General McClellan took possession of all the country up to the Confederate lines near Richmond. The plantations and the country side were laid waste.

At the outbreak of the war, Captain Jeff Sinclair's Company, which afterwards became Company "I" of the 42nd Virginia Regiment, was encamped near the Hopkins home and William Franklin Hopkins enlisted as a soldier being less than 11 years and 6 months old.

Federal soldiers were camped on and around the Hopkins home, but he was determined to go through the lines, guarded day and night. The enemy's fleet of boats lying off Yorktown and along the shore had numerous barges to prevent small boats from passing. Frank did not know this when he started his trip. He had found an old boat near the shore on York River, whose bottom planks were so dried out from the sun that it was of no service. He swelled the cracks by putting wet sand in the bottom and partially submerged it until it would float. Using a pole for a paddle he pushed along in shallow water. Around 8 o'clock at night, under a dark and cloudy sky, he set out through the enemy's lines for his home on Back Creek opposite Goodwin's Neck.

In the darkness suddenly someone struck a match to light a pipe and he saw directly before him one of those barges. He felt that the match kept him from hitting the barge and being arrested.

Being a good swimmer, he rolled out of the boat and wrapping its rope around his chest, he swam into the river. The swift current helped him until later when he could get inside the boat and resume his journey.

Well inside the Federal lines, he passed down the river about two miles with no trouble to a little inlet called Bull's Creek. Rowing the bateau into the weeds, he moored it to a tree. To walk across Goodwin's Neck meant passing again through enemy lines, but he made his way to Williams' farm about a mile away. As he went around the house, he awoke the dogs, so stealthily he made his way to the rail fence where he hid and even slept for an hour. With the dogs again quiet, he proceeded to Williams' landing. In one of the boats there he crossed Back Creek to his mother's place.

It seems that only on the prior evening had the Federal encampment left for a spot nearer to Yorktown. His mother informed him that all cattle, horses, and fowl had been confiscated by the soldiers except his pony.

Soon he rejoined his Confederate comrades and participated in many major battles throughout the war. His memoirs tell of running the blockade several times, each a breath taking experience. He related tales of man to man combat and the salvaging of much needed equipment. He had 'great difficulty unbuckling the girth for the dead horse had become somewhat swollen--he caught hold of the saddle and gave a mighty jerk. He sprang on the body of the horse and leaped across the road, saddle in hand; they fired a volley at him through the woods, He suffered five wounds but none serious.'

In the more savage aspects of war he told that 'the Adjutant of the Regiment mounted the fence and called for his men to follow. An enemy lieutenant using a six shooter killed him instantly; but the next moment Frank shot the Lieutenant and took his pistol and sword to display in his own home in later years. He removed the watch from the body of the Adjutant and sent it to the man's wife.'

Another time during the last days of the fighting around Petersburg, he killed another soldier who was closing in on him. He searched his haversack which contained nothing but a few crumbs of broken crackers and his ground coffee, a cup for making coffee and a drinking cup. There was a fire of old rails near so Frank and a friend, Jack Presson, poured water from their canteens into the cup and made coffee. Fighting was still so fierce that before the coffee boiled, a bullet pierced the coffee cup.'

The war finally ceased, putting an end to such hatred and destruction. He concluded, 'what was left of the command followed the army to Appomatox Court House where the surrender took place and the army was paroled. Pickets were put out before the surrender and I was placed on the roadside where I saw General Lee pass on his way to meet General Grant.'

William Franklin Hopkins was one York County man who was in the war from the Battle of Big Bethel to the surrender at Appomatox. (For details see manuscript: Biography of William Franklin Hopkins by author: unknown granddaughter.

Annie Elizabeth Fletcher Glendenning: born January 6, 1841 at Gibbs, a farm about three miles from Yorktown, lived her early childhood in the county. After the death of her father, Nathaniel Fletcher, her mother moved to Hampton so that her four children could attend public schools. Later she entered Chowan College in Murfreesboro, N. C. where she graduated in 1858.

Her first teaching experience began in Portsmouth, and she was there when the war started. Here are some of her remarks.

Our hatred for those who would ~~are~~ invade our homes was intense. We could not bear arms but with our needles we tried to make our gallant soldiers comfortable. To Mama the coming of the Yankees seemed a dire calamity. She scarcely ever smiled and any hilarity engaged in by the young people almost brought tears to her eyes.

When the troops came to Portsmouth, I was summoned to the office and told to get my possessions; the building had been taken over. This was a death blow to our prospects for a livelihood.

Through a friend near Hampton, I learned that my piano had been taken from my sister's home there before it was burned and carried to Fortress Monroe by one of the quartermasters. One of their officers was kind and let me have it back, but I had to pawn it when we refugeeed from Portsmouth to Richmond.

My sister and some ladies made their escape through very hazardous experiences for they were fired upon when crossing the Nansemond River. We decided on a different route. We made it to Yorktown on a steamer, but it was almost impossible to get a conveyance to Williamsburg. This proved disasterous to our purse for we had to stay at a hotel.

Finally, one afternoon we met some soldiers who were returning to Williamsburg and they offered to take us in their wagons. In a few hours we were at a friend's house. Again we met obstacles for civilians had been permitted to pass through the lines, but someone had given information that had hurt the federal cause. Consequently, others were denied the privilege to go through.

Two other ladies joined our party (and there were four of us). The Provost Marshall of Williamsburg was kind and finally succeeded in getting passes, but he advised us to leave in small groups. Accordingly, Miss Langhorne and I left in a tumbral cart and went about three miles out of Williamsburg to a friend's home. Our trunks were not searched as was customarily done.

The next day, our family together again, we hired two wagons and proceeded over terrible roads and past desolate farms to Tunstall Station where we eventually boarded a train for Richmond. It had taken a week to get from Yorktown to Richmond.

She was hired by Dr. Lewis to live in his home in Kind and Queen County and teach his children privately. There she remained three years as the war increased in intensity. As spring advanced she told:

We were in constant dread of raiding parties. Sheridan, whose aim seemed to starve out the successionists, started his memorable raid. Every day news came that he was advancing, creating havoc and stealing, especially, jewelry and silverware. We devised ways to conceal ours.

Hoops were fashionable so we made strong bags, placed our valuables in them and tied them to the hoops. This slowed down our walking.

Sure enough, a runner reported that the Yankees were about a mile away. The doctor's horses were hidden in the woods with a faithful Negro watching them. Dr. Lewis himself escaped for he would have been killed or captured.

My school had been assembled and I had started the day's exercises when two entered the yard. They were followed by no less than one hundred. They dismounted, walked in, and demanded the keys, whereupon they searched the house from cellar to garret. Trunks, drawers, bookcases, all were opened and the contents scattered on the floors. As fast as one squad left, another came--and so, the entire day we suffered the severest torture of minds.

The cook prepared dinner several times, but each time the soldiers devoured it so we were compelled to fast until sun-down. Mrs. Lewis had a house girl to cook an ash cake and scrambled eggs in her room, but fright had driven away hunger.

With nightfall, we secured the doors and windows, but there was a knock and a demand for food for the horses. Loud talking and the neighing of horses lasted all night but with daylight most of them had left.

Finally by April 1865 and the fall of Richmond, her concern for her family there grew and she attempted another journey. She continued:

I tried in vain, but no one would trust his animals on the highways. A soldier came by driving a two-horse cart and offered me a seat. He was a good driver for the horses were wild and tried to run away. He was carrying lambs to exchange for dry goods which he would sell in the country for produce. A terrific thunderstorm came and the frightened lambs sought comfort from us, even trying to get into our laps. I mention these circumstances to show how desperate I was to join my family.

She concluded her story by saying, "I tremble when I think how my sinful heart rebelled against the decrees of an all wise God."

The General was right when he said, "War is hell." It was only one hundred years ago that this nation was torn apart by conflict. Yet, look around and see the beautiful countryside and the progress that has been made in our land. The character of the people and their love for God and their fellowman has made it possible to subdue hatreds and prejudices and to work together for one nation, undivided, with justice for all.

WORLD WAR I

During World War I Yorktown was used as a Naval Base. The Atlantic Fleet of the United States Navy made the river look like a city at night when all the ships were lit up. Tiny concession stands were built edge to edge, with no symmetry on the shoreline along Water Street. Newport News, Hampton, and Buckroe Beach were far distant with miles of almost impassable dirt roads between.

Then it was through the efforts of a York County lawyer that a concrete road, via Naval Weapons Station, Warwick Court House, past Camp Morrison and Camp Stuart, was built to Newport News. No public busses were in operation, but private individuals used their open Fords and other automobiles to "run jitney." Feeding the sailors and running taxis was profitable for some local men.

With the lack of housing at that time of development in the county, the families (wives and children) of the officers on the ships stayed in private homes throughout the area.

The Naval Mine Depot was built where mines were made, stored, tested, loaded, and issued for war purposes. By Proclamation of the President, the Navy procured 12,562 acres of York County land which meant the relocation for the residents. Some scattered; some made a settlement at Lackey.

Penniman was a thriving city located on the river with more than 5,000 inhabitants. DuPont had an ammunition plant there.

Below Yorktown another 270 acres was purchased by the Government to establish the Naval Oil Depot (Fuel Oil Station). Quantities of oil and other fuel moved through this to the Atlantic Fleet.

The draft was issued and York County manpower registered. Young men (mostly single) from throughout the county met the call. Quite a few gave their lives, dying in camp (pneumonia and influenza were rampant) or on foreign fields. When the War Department tried to notify one family that their son was a casualty, it took all day for a coherent message to come over the one telephone line. In that one community, which was relatively small in 1918, four veterans were interred in Zion Methodist Churchyard. This was typical.

Red Cross units were organized--one in Penniman and one down the county. Women were busy knitting and filling packages to be sent the servicemen who were away.

World War I was also the beginning of women leaving the home for employment. The military bases and ammunition factory needed their labor. Schools did not open their sessions until late, even just before Christmas in some communities because women teachers were not available; rarely did men teach then.

WORLD WAR II

Peace did not last long, for in the 1930's the world aggressors expressed their contempt for democracy. This was a threat to the American way of life and while many in the United States advocated isolationism, still others saw the necessity of aiding European allies.

The United States Congress abolished the arms embargo and the sale of munitions was activated. The Naval Weapons Station at Yorktown, considerably enlarged, was a busy place running shifts continuously night and day. Cheatham Annex of the Norfolk Naval Supply Center was added and the naval fuel facilities were expanded.

Because the United States had been attacked and was engaged in a war on two fronts, every able-bodied male, married or single, was in uniform, leaving the very young, the aged, and women to work on materials and war supplies. Government owned busses were operated throughout the county to accommodate the workers on military bases.

Camp Peary, comprising 11,000 acres in the Magruder area, was bought in 1942 by the United States Government as a Sea Bee's Naval Base. It has been estimated that approximately 40,000 men were stationed there during World War II. It continued as a Sea Bee base until 1946. The government presently uses it for highly classified purposes.

Meanwhile, the residents of York County entered into civilian services in the war effort. Stations for spotting aeroplanes were set up throughout the county and these were managed twenty-four hours, around the clock, daily. This was considered necessary due to the strategic location of York County to say nothing of the military activities there.

The Red Cross had designated places where groups of volunteers made bandages and packaged these ready for shipment to the war zones. Most of these were women whose men were actively engaged in some brand of the military.

Rationing of any goods useful to the war effort was the accepted procedure. Sugar, gasoline, fuel oil, coffee, tires, canned goods, meats, and sheer hose were on the list. White cloth was almost non-existent so sheets, pillowcases, and men's white shirts were well worn when discarded.

War ships plied the river in a steady stream. In World War I the lighted ships made the river look like a city, but in World War II lights were subdued and black-outs were ordered.

People had window shades, black on one side and colored on the other. Even school rooms were equipped with black shades.

(This is just a fractional part of what went on in York County during World War II.)

TRANSPORTATION

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was laid from Richmond to Newport News in 1881 and a portion of the line ran through the county before some annexation action. While there was no station in York, roads did link the residents with the line at Williamsburg, Grove, Lee Hall, Orianna, and Oyster Point.

Just when steamship service on the river began needs further research. However, during the Civil War boats were available from Norfolk to Yorktown and possibly other ports of call along the river on both sides.

The Chesapeake Steamship Company had steamers whose routes began at West Point, stopped along the York River, and tied up at Baltimore. There is an account about the Louise which was purchased by the Baltimore, Chesapeake, and Richmond Steamboat Company to carry freight and passengers between Baltimore and West Point, using the York River. She made her first trip to West Point June 17, 1874 and was described as a "fine steamer equipped with 50 staterooms and 60 berths." She was sold in 1885 to another company. This company also had the Chesapeake Line operating between Baltimore, Old Point Comfort and Norfolk. Some steamship companies and railroad lines were managed jointly.

At the same time Old Dominion Steamship Company had steamers plying the James, Ware, North, and Severn Rivers. So, residents of York County, with Yorktown as a port of call, to say nothing of the other wharves up and down the river, were able to travel far and wide. The movement of produce (agricultural products and seafoods to markets and dry goods and other manufactured goods for the people in general) was an equally important factor.

Over the years numerous vessels were built for the Chesapeake Steamship Company and these competed with the Baltimore Steam Packet Company until 1941 when the Interstate Commerce Commission approved plans for the latter to take over the steamship route. This ended the years of rivalry between the two companies.

Because of the scarcity of ships during World War II the government acquired vessels from the private sector. It was then that four steamers of the merged companies were sold, leaving only two--City of Norfolk and City of Richmond to handle the heavy wartime traffic on the York River and Chesapeake Bay. It has been said that they served commendably during one of the busiest periods of the Baltimore Steam Packet's history.

In 1942 the York River service was dropped, thus concluding the direct link of York County to Baltimore and points north.

In the 1950's a passenger service was offered by the Gray Wolf bus line linking the middle county residents with Hampton and the lower peninsula. This has been discontinued.

For present day transportation services, see York County Data Summary.

GEOGRAPHY

Virginia is divided into three natural regions: Coastal Plain or Tidewater, Piedmont Uplands, and Appalachian Highland. York County is entirely within the Coastal Plain and is a part of section between the York and James Rivers known as "The Peninsula," comprising Williamsburg, James City, Newport News, Hampton, and York County. The York River separates it from Gloucester County and Back River forms a partial boundary line with Hampton. The county runs almost parallel with northern Newport News (formerly Warwick County) and joins it at Harpersville on Route 17. The bridge on Route 134 connects Hampton and York County as does the bridge on Big Bethel Road. Jame City-Williamsburg and York boundaries are in the upper regions in Bruton District.

Although at one time York County included what is now New Kent, Gloucester, Mathews, York (including the City of Poquoson) and a part of Lancaster Counties, it is presently considered one of the smaller counties in the Commonwealth. Subdivisions and annexation have left it a long and narrow tract with a land area of 122 square miles or 78,080 acres and water area of 20 square miles.

Along the York River is found a rather regular coastline with perpendicular cliffs extending from upper Bruton District to the United States Coast Guard Reserve Training Center just below Yorktown. Creeks and streams flow into the rivers serving useful purposes. Below Wormley's Creek tide level shorelines and marshes run to the lower extremities of the county. Poquoson River with its deep creeks and tributaries and Back River with its two prongs flow into Chesapeake Bay.

There is a variation of from 4 to 30 feet in the land surface of the upland regions, rolling slightly to dissect hills as they border on stream courses. This is noted in Bruton District and a part of Nelson District. Grafton and Bethel Districts and the City of Poquoson are much flatter and in spots the elevation above sea level is so slight that adequate drainage requires special consideration. Acres of marine marshland are found in the Bay Trees (lower Seaford) and the Messick section of Poquoson.

The tidal streams do not extend far inland, and at their mouths they are often comparable to rivers, but they decrease in size as they proceed to the tidal influence. All of these are still considered assets of the county, though their uses have changed with the years. Among these are: Skimino Creek, Carter's Creek, King's Creek, Queen's Creek, Felgate's Creek, Wormley's Creek with its branches, Back Creek, Chisman's Creek, Claxton's Creek, Patrick's Creek, Bennett's Creek, Lamb's Creek, and Quarter Marsh. Even the coves have scenic and recreational value.

Factors for classifying soil are texture, physical properties, and position with respect to drainage. The soils in York County range from clay and silt to fine gravel; veins of sand and marl are located in the middle section. But the prevailing composition throughout the county is medium sandy loam. For more details see "Section XIV. Natural Resources," Data Summary, York County by the Division of State Planning

and Community Affairs and Soil Survey of the Yorktown Area by R.T.A. Burke and A. S. Root, a United States Department of Agriculture bulletin issued in 1906.

The climate in York County is mild and temperate, rarely very hot or extremely cold, though it may be changeable. The Gulf Stream Drift, moving up the Atlantic Ocean, brings with it warm air, which, distributed by the winds, moderates the climate in winter. This eliminates hard freezes and early and late frosts. Yet the winds from the ocean, moving across the Bay, rivers, and tributaries in summer, give to the section a rather pleasant climate with their cooling breezes.

The annual rainfall has been registered as ranging from 35 to 50 inches which gives sufficient precipitation for growing crops. Easterly winds usually accompany the fall and winter rains. Winds from the east and southeast prevail during the other seasons. Thunder showers do sometimes make up from the west and a northeast storm (a northeasterner) can strike upon occasions.

The economy of a people is geared to the geography and natural resources at hand. Consequently, agriculture was the main source of income for three centuries. Tobacco was productive until the soil was depleted. Potatoes, grains, and grasses were staples. Truck farms with a variety of vegetables, melons, and small fruits found ready markets in Norfolk, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Labor was no problem. Farmers raised fowl, several hogs, and a few cattle for their own use, but only a few were for market. However, since the World Wars, agriculture has declined and people have sought employment at government installations, in private industry, and in local small businesses. A limited quantity of foodstuff is still raised in particular sections of the county, but many farms have been converted into housing developments today.

Fisheries and shipping were by no means secondary, for at one time the oyster fisheries of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries were among the best in the world. Millions of bushels found their way to markets annually, thus employing a large number of people. A vast variety of fish common to the middle latitudes abounded in local waters. Boat carpenters and ship chandlers plied their trades as they provided and supplied small boats including canoes, sloops, schooners, sail boats, bateaus, and other small vessels which used the waterways. Ship captains and crews were as confident on the rivers and Chesapeake Bay as they were on land and thus was developed a stock of hearty, rugged York County men.

RELIGION

In studying the history of an early county the importance of the parish and its ministers must not be minimized. Realizing the relationship of Church and State then, it must be recalled that the Church had specific functions which in present society are done by the government. Also any religious groups or sects practicing beliefs and tenets outside of the Established Church were considered with disfavor. A York County record indicates that in 1698 a group of Quakers were holding meetings in the woods and action was taken to interrupt this.

It has been said that Thomas Story and Roger Gill, Quaker preachers, began their Virginia ministry in York County on December 11, 1698 in the home of Edward Thomas. In the Skimino Creek region the home of John Bates was likewise used. This congregation soon vanished and any York County Quakers today worship elsewhere on the Peninsula.

The Established Church, functioning through the Vestrymen, had charge of all vital statistics. The Charles Parish Register (York County) is a good example, giving the name of the child, his parentage, birthdate, baptismal record, beginning with 1648 and running through 1789. Deaths of the church members were recorded too and marriage records stated the parentage and ages of the couple, the date, and the minister who performed the ceremony. The Abingdon Parish Register (Gloucester County) has been preserved and is a good present day reference for early marriages.

The minutes kept by the Vestrymen bear witness that welfare work was the business of the Church. Orphan boys were bound out to people who taught them a trade and provided room and board in return for their labor. Poor girls were placed in homes throughout the parish where they, too, worked.

Unwed mothers and illegitimate children fell under the jurisdiction of the Established Church and action taken by the Vestry would be considered harsh by present day standards. People who absented themselves from worship services were fined.

In all these matters the Church and law (Government) worked together. Meanwhile, as the spirit of democracy grew and people dared think more independently, more religious freedom seemed right. Varying religious differences began to be expressed through the formation of churches other than the Episcopal Church.

Following a court session held for York County on June 17, 1765 this record was made:

These are to certify the worshipful court of York that we intend to make use of a House in the City of Williamsburg situated on part of a lott belonging to Mr. George Davenport on a place for the Public Worship of God according to the practice of Protestant Dissenters of the Presbyterian denomination which we desire may be registered in the

Records of the Court and this certificate we make according to the direction of an act of Parliament called the Act of Toleration.

This request bears the names of sixteen men.

There was a Presbyterian Church many years inside what is now Camp Peary, but Presbyterianism did not spread throughout the county in the early years. The present Yorkminster Presbyterian Church had its beginning when nineteen people met in 1954 and made plans for a church. On January 9, 1955 the first worship service was held in the York County Courthouse with 56 in attendance and was officially organized by a Commission from Norfolk Presbytery August 14, 1955 with 51 charter members. Dr. Walter Harrop, the first minister, accepted a call in September 1956. A house of worship was soon constructed in Grafton and the membership has grown to 560 in 1972.

Grafton Baptist Church was constituted in 1777 although the Baptist movement was active much earlier. A church historian has commented that "Elijah Baker planted it; Joshua Morris watered it; John Wright cultivated it; and Matthew Wood, Robert Stacey, and Ivison Lewis joined it." Elijah Baker was an itinerant preacher ministering on the peninsula between the James and York Rivers as early as 1775. He is credited with having organized the early Baptist churches in the vicinity which were the forerunners of the numerous Baptist churches in York County and the surrounding areas.

It seems that the house of worship for Grafton Baptist Church was on land not owned by the congregation. Hence, Richard Garrett, Jr., the owner, granted them a deed dated June 16, 1806 and they proceeded with repairing and enlarging their church building. The membership mounted to 497 in 1809 and the church body carried on a program of their denomination until 1832 when there appeared internal dissension.

Alexander Campbell, of the Disciples of Christ Church, preached in York County and the pastor of Grafton Baptist Church, Elder Peter Ainslie, adopted some of the reformed views. Thus it was that the congregation divided with a part remaining Baptist and a new church, the Grafton Christian or Disciples of Christ Church being founded.

The earliest date in the first register for Grafton Christian Church is May 11, 1834. The names of more than fifty charter members are given. (Photocopy of this book is in the Virginia State Library, Richmond.) This church has continued active throughout the years. Although their building was used as a stable during the Civil War, it is one of the prettier edifices in the county today. Many vital statistics were recorded by Grafton Christian Church.

Methodism is somewhat widespread in York County, there being six rather large congregations and churches. Record shows that George Whitefield preached in Bruton Parish Church in 1739 to a large assemblage when he was enroute to join John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in Georgia. When Methodist representatives came to the colonies regularly after 1769, they stopped over in York County to strengthen the work as they preached up and down the Atlantic coastline.

The York County Methodist churches consider 1785 as the beginning date for their formal organization into a constitutional body. They were a part of the Williamsburg circuit. As different groups grew in strength and numbers they were ready to branch out into individual churches.

The deed for Tabernacle Methodist Church in Poquoson bears the date 1817; 1822 was the beginning date for Union Methodist Church in Seaford. In 1849 Providence Methodist Church was built in Dare. Since then Trinity Church in Poquoson was organized in 1885 and Crocks Memorial Church in Yorktown had its origin in 1909. Saint Luke's Church has been ministering to an area for about ten years. In recent years, with certain mergers, these churches are now known as United Methodist Church.

During the period of World War I (1914-1918) a colony of Polish people settled in Waterview. They soon established a Catholic Church to meet their religious needs. Years later lightning destroyed the building so a priest from West Point instructed the children in the Waterview House, then vacant. Since then St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church has been built near Yorktown and is a thriving church.

In more recent years other denominations have constructed places of worship and well organized programs are being carried out in all of the churches. The government has assumed the responsibility of vital statistics and welfare, but the present churches still perform social functions as well as meet special needs of the people in York County and elsewhere.